

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O P 031118Z APR 75
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4432
INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T HONG KONG 3525

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT MILI
SUBJ: TRAN VAN DON REQUEST FOR SIT REPT/FRENCH INITIATIVE

1. VICE PREMIER TRAN VAN DON, AFTER TOUR IN AFRICA, ARRIVED HONG KONG TODAY AND REQUESTED INTERVIEW WITH CONSUL GENERAL. ACCOMPANIED BY AIDE, LTCOL LE VAN KANH, DON ASKED TO CONVEY MESSAGES TO SAIGON THAT HE WILL RETURN ON APRIL 5 WITH LATEST PLANNED RETURN ON SIXTH. HE ASKED FOR INFORMAL ASSESSMENT FROM AMERICANS IN SAIGON OF GENERAL POLITICAL SITUATION AMONG VIETNAMESE LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS MILITARY SITUATION.

2. DON ASKED US TO PASS ON TO DEPARTMENT AS IMPORTANT INITIATIVE SUBSTANCE OF CONVERSTAION IN PARIS MARCH 31 WITH MR. SAINTENY WHO SAID THAT ONE WEEK BEFORE PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING TOLD HIM FRENCH WOULD BE WILLING TO MEDIATE IN VIET-NAM BUT ONLY IF ALL THREE VIETNAMESE PARTICIPANTS TO 1973 PARIS AGREEMENTS REQUESTED IT. NO OTHER PRECONDITIONS ON MODALITIES WERE DISCUSSED BY DON INTENDED TO CONVEY THIS AS PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM FRENCH TO THIEU.

3. DON'S BIGGEST CONCERN WAS APPARENT SEPARATE STATEMENTS BY LEADING PERSONALITIES IN SAIGON WITHOUT CONCERN FOR WHAT DON DESCRIBED AS GREATEST NEED-- PULLING TOGETHER. AS SUCH, HOWEVER, HE FELT KY STATEMENTS WERE MORE POSITIVE THAN THOSE

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OF BIG MINH. DON OUTLINED HIS DESIRE TO SEE BROUGHT TOGETHER

DECISIVE LEADERSHIP GROUP COMMITTED TO MOTIVATING THE ARMY TO FIGHT AND TO OPENING DISCUSSION WITH THE OTHER SIDE. PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT WAS TO ARREST PANIC WHICH IS BEING SHOWN TO THE WORLD. DON STATED THAT WITHOUT STRONG UNITED LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER, THERE WAS NOT NEED FOR THE OTHER SIDE TO CONSIDER TALKING. WHILE RECOGNIZING UNITED STATES WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO INTERVENE MILITARILY TO SAVE VIET-NAM, DON DID HOPE THAT AMEMBASSY SAIGON WOULD USE POLITICAL WEIGHT TO PERSUADE SAIGON LEADERSHIP TO PULL TOGETHER. DON VIEWED THIEU'S SITUATION AS UNTENABLE BUT FELT THAT A WAY OUT COULD BE FOUND, VIA THE BAO DAI PRECEDENT, WITH FULL POWERS TRANSFERRED TO NEW GOVERNMENT LEADERS WITH THIEU CONTINUING AS TITULAR CHIEF OF STATE. DON OBVIOUSLY SEES HIMSELF AS IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN ANY LEADERSHIP GROUP BUT CAREFULLY AND APPARENTLY SINCERELY AVOIDED ANY FACTIONAL OR SELF-SERVING REMARKS.

4. DON ALSO PRESENTED BLEAK PICTURE OF VIETNAMESE MISSIONS AND CITIZENS ABROAD BOTH TOTALLY UNINFORMED ABOUT EVENTS AND ONLY ABLE TO RELY ON TELEVISION AND PRESS COVERAGE WHICH LEFT THEM EVEN FURTHER DISTRESSED. RESIDENTS ABROAD UNABLE TO GET ANY INFORMATION ABOUT FAMILIES AND DON SUGGESTED US MIGHT MAKE SOME ARRANGEMENTS TO TRANSMIT INFORMATION.

5. WE WILL OF COURSE BE GLAD TO PASS ON ANYTHING SAIGON OR DEPARTMENT CARES TO GIVE US DURING NEXT 24 HOURS. IF THERE IS ANYTHING IT WOULD BE WORTHWHILE FOR DON TO SAY OUT LOUD WORLD PRESS WOULD BE INSTANTLY AVAILABLE. HE IS NOW ADOPTING VERY LOW PROFILE, NOT EVEN CONTACTING VN CONGEN.
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